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ABSTRACT

Studies conducted by the University of Tulsa, Arizona State University, Utah State University, and the Indian Health Service have indicated a high incidence of handicapping conditions among the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) student population. Of the approximately 50,000 students in the nearly 200 BIA schools, some 19,000 have been estimated to need special education services. Of these, about 4,000 are currently receiving some type of special education service. Although considerable special education activity has taken place in BIA schools over the past nine years, some 95% of the special education programs in the BIA have been operated with flow-through funds from the U.S. Office of Education. Some of these programs are Project COPE, Project PISCES, Project ASSET, Project IN-SLIP, Project MESA, and Project MASTER. Each year since 1972, the Office of Indian Education Programs has sought line item funding for special education in BIA schools, but has not been able to obtain it. Neither are there BIA regulations concerning the education of the handicapped. The two outstanding present needs concerning full special education services in the BIA are: budget line item for initiating and maintaining special education programs and services in BIA operated schools, and mandatory legislation with respect to the education of exceptional Indian children. (Author/NQ)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION EFFORTS FOR AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKAN NATIVE CHILDREN BY THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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FOREWORD

Special Education needs in Indian Education are great and the Bureau of Indian Affairs has been providing leadership aimed at meeting them. Dr. Robert Hall, the author of this report, has been providing leadership in Special Education at the BIA Central Office level since 1967. It is with special pleasure that his most recent paper on the subject is made available to Indian Tribes, BIA employees, professionals in Special Education, Tribal Contract School personnel, the academic community, Congress, and the general public. This is a watershed paper that provides an excellent background discussion of the Special Education movement in BIA. His description of current efforts is very informative and should be enlightening to those interested in Special Education for Indian children. Dr. Hall invites your comments regarding the paper, but more importantly, he solicits your support for Special Education for Indian children.

William J. Benham, Administrator
Indian Education Resources Center

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SPECIAL EDUCATION IN

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS SCHOOLS

Introduction

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) operates some 200 Federal schools for Native Americans (American Indians, Eskimos and Aleutian Island Natives). The total school population is approximately 50,000 with grade levels varying from kindegarten to three institutions offering two years of post-secondary education. The schools are located in 17 States, from Florida to Alaska, with a concentration in such States as Arizona, New Mexico, South Dakota and Oklahoma.

There are 12 Area Offices whose responsibility includes the operation of any BIA schools within their geographical regions. The Central Office is located in Washington, D. C., with Dr. William Demmert, as Director of Indian Education Programs. The Indian Education Resources Center, located in Albuquerque, NM, is a part of Dr. Demmert's office. The Division of Continuing Education, of which I am Division Chief, has responsibility for coordinating special education efforts within the BIA.

The U. S. Office of Education, in distributing funds to States through its Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, has recognized the BIA as the "57th State," right after such areas as Guam and the Trust

Territories. The BIA then participates as a full member in the National Association of State Directors of Special Education and in programs of the Regional Resource Centers (RRC) and the Area Learning Resource Centers (ALRC). The BIA is served through the RRC in Salt Lake City, Utah, and the ALRC in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Although BIA schools are located within particular States, the BIA school system is a separate system from the public schools. They do not ordinarily receive the same services provided to public schools within the States. This is the reason for the recognition as the BIA as a "State" on its own merit.

There is further complexity in programs for Alaskan Native and American Indians in the very special relationship between them and the Federal Government. This relationship establishes a process of self-determination. In reference to education, this means that tribal units and other Native organizations may operate educational facilities independently. At this time, the BIA has contracted the total operational responsibility of 16 schools to such tribally sanctioned operation. There are at least 30 other Native schools which are not under contract but which are totally owned and operated by tribes or other sanctioned Native groups.

The majority of States look upon these contracts or tribally operated schools as being private in nature. Consequently, funding the needs of children in these schools with ESEA or EHA money is not possible through

State means. The BIA, therefore, remains a meaningful advocate of these children and provides such money for services to children in these schools on the same basis as it does for children in the schools operated by the BIA. "In Fiscal Year 1976, well over $1,000,000 of title money has gone from the BIA to provide services to children in these schools."

Developing Benchmarks for the Delivery of Services

Special education was introduced as a viable concept to the BIA education system only ten years ago. Like many emerging nations, it has had to make its own mistakes, develop its own philosophies, prescribe its own remedies. It is a slow process and one that requires trial and error programs that will establish benchmarks.

It seemed to us that to aid our school administrators and their constituents in recognizing the need and the purposefulness of special education intervention, it was necessary to carry out projects which would accumulate data and demonstrate efficiency. Many of these projects were carried out by contract or third party agents in the hopes that this would lend further credence to the theories. This then became a period of fact finding which would permit for the direct delivery of services to handicapped Alaskan Native and American Indian children.

Incidence of Handicapping Conditions

Numerous studies have indicated a high incidence of handicapping conditions among the BIA student population. This may be attributed to

the selective enrollment policy of BIA schools, as well as to the adverse environmental conditions on many reservations due to poverty and isolation. Some of these studies should be cited.

University of Tulsa. Of 2,030 BIA students tested by the University of Tulsa in the fall of 1970, 76 percent had a vision, speech, or hearing problem. These were students in BIA schools located in Oklahoma and Mississippi.[1]

Arizona State University. After the evaluation of students at the Phoenix Indian School, a final report of the Arizona State University stated, "Indian school students appear to have about twice as many individuals who have language difficulties as would be found in a public school."[2].

Utah State University. In a 1970 report of an evaluation of 2,000 Intermountain Indian School students, Utah State University stated that of 345 students screened for vision difficulties, 53 percent had a significant visual acuity defect that does not appear to be adequately corrected by glasses. Of 308 students tested for hearing, 32 percent had medically significant hearing losses which call for special education intervention.[3]

Indian Health Service. The Indian Health Service reported the incidence rate of Otitis Media in 1971 to be 10.5 percent for all ages of Indians.[4] Otitis Media results in differing degrees of hearing impairment particularly

among younger children. An earlier survey of 3,318 Navajo students in boarding schools on the Navajo Reservation revealed the prevalence rate of chronic Otitis Media to be over 7 percent, which is about 15 times greater than that of the general population.[5]

Such studies as these, plus direct observation by special education practitioners in the BIA, have led to estimates that some 19,000 of the approximately 50,000 students in BIA schools are in need of some type of special education service. Of this number, approximately 5,000 are now being served by special education programs to some degree.

Pilot Projects

During the two-year period of 1964-66, the Education Office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs initiated a pilot project in the identification and education of mentally retarded children in the Shiprock, New Mexico, Agency.[6] The project was significant in that it provided evidence that the incidence of mental deficiency among Indian children probably does not run any higher than in the general population. Furthermore, the Shiprock Project showed that there can be a high prognosis of success when a thorough program is mounted against functional mental retardation.

Due to the fact that the BIA does not have categorical funds for special education as a line item in the BIA budget, some 95 percent of special education programs in the BIA have been and are funded from flow-through funds from USOE. Some of the pilot projects supported by these funds are as follows:

Project COPE. During the 1968-69 school year, Arizona State University was contracted to work with the Phoenix Indian School in a program called "Project COPE."[2] Tests given to 9th and 10th graders revealed that 91 percent scored below grade level. (Now that we are more knowledgeable about tests, we relize that this may have told as much about the tests and the use of the tests as it did about the students!) Significantly, the final report of this project carried strong recommendations that special education services be provided to Indian students in need of such services, especially in the early grades.

Project PISCES. Arizona State University was contracted with during the 1969-70 school year for a comprehensive evaluation of the education of students at the Phoenix Indian School, Project PISCES. The evaluation further established the fact of a significant number of students needing special education services.

Project ASSET. Also during the 1969-70 school year at the Phoenix Indian School, Northern Arizona University carried out Project ASSET.[8] This included special education services which gave very positive results, including proof of the value of a resource room program.

Project IN-SLIP. Another pilot project during the 1969-70 school year was Project IN-SLIP[3] at the Intermountain Indian School under contract with Utah State University. This project further established that significant numbers of Indian students have articulatory problems, difficulty with comprehension of English words, and problems with hearing and vision.

Project MESA. The 1969-70 school year also the beginning of a highly successful program for the handicapped at the Wahpeton Indian School in North Dakota, Project MESA.[9] The staff of this project included a speech pathologist, reading specialist, special education teacher, counselor, and a school social worker. The project demonstrated that direct special education services to students gave measurable results and that such programs could integrate successfully into the overall school program.

During the 1970-71 school year, pilot programs in the Oklahoma and Mississippi area included the Muskogee Area's Project MASTER,[1] a contract with Tulsa University for identification of vision, speech, and hearing problems and related followup activities, as well as the Anadarko Area's Project CONCHO,[10] a contract with the Canadian Valley Regional Educational Laboratory to provide special educational services to the youth of Concho Indian School. These programs gave further evidence of the value of such services in identifying and helping students in need of special education, but also further showed the need for categorical funding for such programs by the fact that the programs were terminated after the one year for lack of funds.

Personnel Training

During the summer of 1968, regional workshops for BIA educators were held at Jamestown College in North Dakota, the University of Oklahoma, the University of New Mexico and at Arizona State University. This was followed by a national conference in December 1968 for BIA education administrators. During these meetings, presentations were made by

nationally known experts in the field of special education; small group discussion sessions were conducted; reaction panel discussions were utilized; and selected films dealing with special education were shown.[11]

Many BIA teachers have been trained in special education for the handicapped during the past seven years by Western Michigan University through a program developed jointly by the BIA and Western Michigan University and funded by the Bureau of Educational and Professional Development of USOE and more recently by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped. This program has included inservice training at various schools throughout the BIA, as well as summer programs for BIA teachers on the campus of Western Michigan University at Kalamazoo. Our major concern at this time is seeing an increase in Alaskan and Indian teachers of special education take place.

A weeklong workshop in special education was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, during March 1971 for educational and tribal leaders from throughout the BIA. These leaders visited schools for the handicapped in the Albuquerque Area during their workshop, and learned of the latest development in education of the handicapped. They wholeheartedly endorsed efforts for implementing a comprehensive program of special education services for handicapped children in BIA schools.

Limited Implementation of Special Education Programs

During the spring and summer of 1971, the Central Office of the BIA worked with the Aberdeen Area Office in developing a set of Special Education Guidelines for the Aberdeen Area as a pilot project. Following this lead, the Albuquerque Area Office developed a draft of guidelines by the end of the year.

By the beginning of the school year, 1971-72, there was such an awareness of special education needs of students throughout the BIA that a large number of schools gave priority to the establishment of special education programs from whatever source of funds they could find. For example, the Navajo Area utilized $990,450 of its ESEA Title I funds (for education of the disadvantaged) specifically for special education programs for the mentally handicapped, learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, and for those with other handicapping conditions.

At the present time, some $3,000,000 of Title I and Title VI-B funds are being used for special education programs in the BIA. The Central Office has one professional person who devotes full-time to special education, plus two others, including myself, who are involved in special education in addition to other functions. In the 12 BIA Area Offices, four have persons who work essentially full-time in special education and the remainder have a person who has special education assigned as an additional duty. Most large BIA schools have at least one special education teacher, and some of the small schools are served by itinerant teachers, and some of the smaller schools are served by

itinerant teachers. However, not enough is done to serve the preschool handicapped, the out-of-school handicapped, and the older handicapped.

The use of flow-through funds for special education has limitations. Employees hired with these funds must, of necessity, be temporary employees. Good teachers, therefore, tend to look for permanent positions when they are available, causing problems with continuity of programs. Furthermore, job security even on a temporary appointment is sometimes uncertain around refunding time due to lack of assurance of continuing funds, giving further reason to the teachers to look elsewhere for permanent positions. Also, administration and others tend to look at programs funded with flow-through funds as supplementary programs rather than as basic educational programs and perhaps subconsciously, consider them as less important than the basic programs.

Need for Special Education as a Budget Line Item

The U. S. Congress and legislators of the fifty States have experienced that omnibus bills for education do not adequately provide specific services to the handicapped, and that categorical funding for the education of the handicapped remains necessary. Each of the fifty States has special provisions for the education of handicapped children in their school systems. The same is true in the District of Columbia and most outlying territories. The BIA seems to remain the only major education system amont the "57 States" without special education as a budget line item. It is also the only education system without specific regulations

concerning education of the handicapped. Consequently, the two outstanding needs concerning full special education services in BIA schools are: (1) a budget line item for initiating and maintaining special education programs and services in BIA-operated schools, and (2) mandatory legislation with respect to the education of exceptional Indian children.

It is extimated that as much as $12,000,000 would be needed for the first year of a full-funded program of education of the handicapped in the BIA. Although special education as a budget line item has been requested each year since 1972, such categorical funding has not been approved for BIA education as of the present. The reasons for this have been a budget-conscious administration and, perhaps the fact that we have been without a permanent Director of Indian Education Programs. We will work with our new Director, Dr. Demmert, to see if this can be accomplished in the future. At the same time, attention will continue to be given to the establishment of regulations mandating special education in BIA schools.

Although we don't have everything we need for a full program of special education, we are actively taking advantage of the resources presently available. We especially appreciate the availability of Title I and Title VI-B funds, the tremendous help we receive from the Southwest Regional Resource Center and Area Learning Resource Center, and from association with other State departments of education through the

National Association of State Directors of Special Education. We also are grateful for the interest and advocacy we are presently receiving from CEC, expecially through the efforts of Mr. Bruce Ramirez.

Thank You.

SUMMARY

Of the approximately 50,000 students in the nearly 200 schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, some 19,000 have been estimated to need special education services. Of these 19,000, about 4,000 are currently receiving some type of special education service.

Although considerable special education activity has taken place in BIA schools over the past 9 years, most have been operated with flow-through funds from USOE, with perhaps 5 percent of special education programs being funded with regular BIA budget funds. Each year since 1972, the Office of Indian Education Programs has sought line item funding for special education in BIA schools, but has not been able to obtain it. Neither are there BIA regulations concerning the education of the handicapped.

The two outstanding present needs concerning full special education services in the BIA are:

(1) Budget line item for initiating and maintaining special education programs and services in BIA operated schools, and

(2) Mandatory legislation with respect to the education of exceptional Indian children.

1. Project MASTER, Final Report, June 1971. Muskogee Area Identification of Vision, Speech and Hearing Problems and Related Followup Activities. Contracted with University of Tulsa.

2. Project COPE, Third Quarterly Report, 1969, Phoenix Indian School. Contracted with Arizona State University.

3. Project IN-SLIP, Final Report, August 1970. Intermountain School Learner Identification Program, Utah State University.

4. Indian Health Trends and Services, 1974, U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Indian Health Services, Office of Program Statistics.

5. Ronald L. Johnson, "Chronic Otitis Media in School-Age Navajo Indians," Laryngoscope 77 (November 1967) 1990-1995. (Quoted in Background Paper on American Indian Exceptional Children, 1976, by Bruce Ramirez, CEC.)

6. An Interdisciplinary Approach in the Identification of Mentally Retarded Indian Children, Addendum, December 1966, BIA.

7. Project PISCES, Phoenix Indian School Comprehensive Evaluation of Education of Students, 1969. Contracted with Arizona State University.

8. Project ASSET, Accelerating Specialized School Experiences Today, Phoenix Indian School. Contracted with Northern Arizona University, Final Report, 1970.

9. Project MESA, Final Report and Pictorial Booklet, Wahpeton Indian School, North Dakota, 1969-1970.

10. Project CONCHO, Special Education Services for Exceptional Indian Children, Anadarko Area, Concho, Oklahoma, 1970-1971.

11. Special Education Workshop, Final Report, Vol. 1, January 1969. Prepared by AVCO Economic Systems Corporation, Division of Education and Training.